

Oysters for Zanzibar

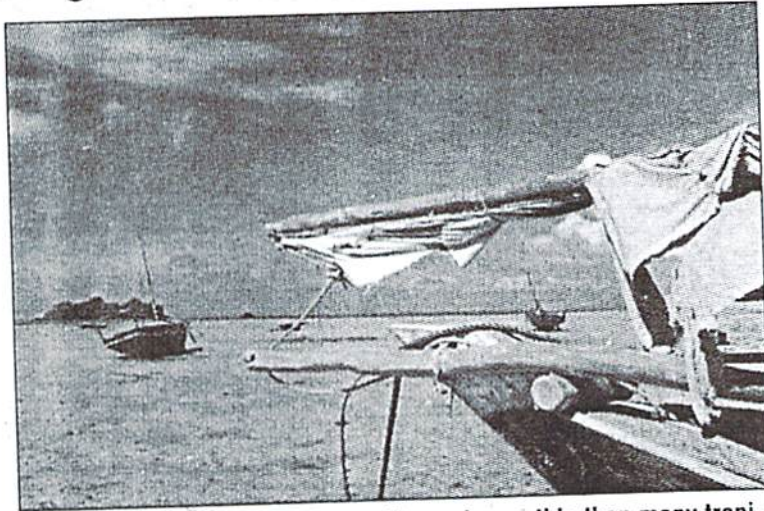
BUSINESS
&
INDUSTRY

Company helps bring shellfish farming to Africa

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It's a country without steady power, where the average annual salary is only a few hundred dollars, and one-third of children under the age of five are malnourished — in short, it's about as far from Duxbury as one can get.

Yet a team from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, with help from Island Creek Oysters, is working in the African nation of Zanzibar to develop a shellfish hatchery that will bring food and money to



A tidal flat in Zanzibar. The island has a larger tide than many tropical countries, which makes it ideal for shellfish farming.

Photo from islandcreekoysters.com

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ICO brings oysters across the world to Zanzibar

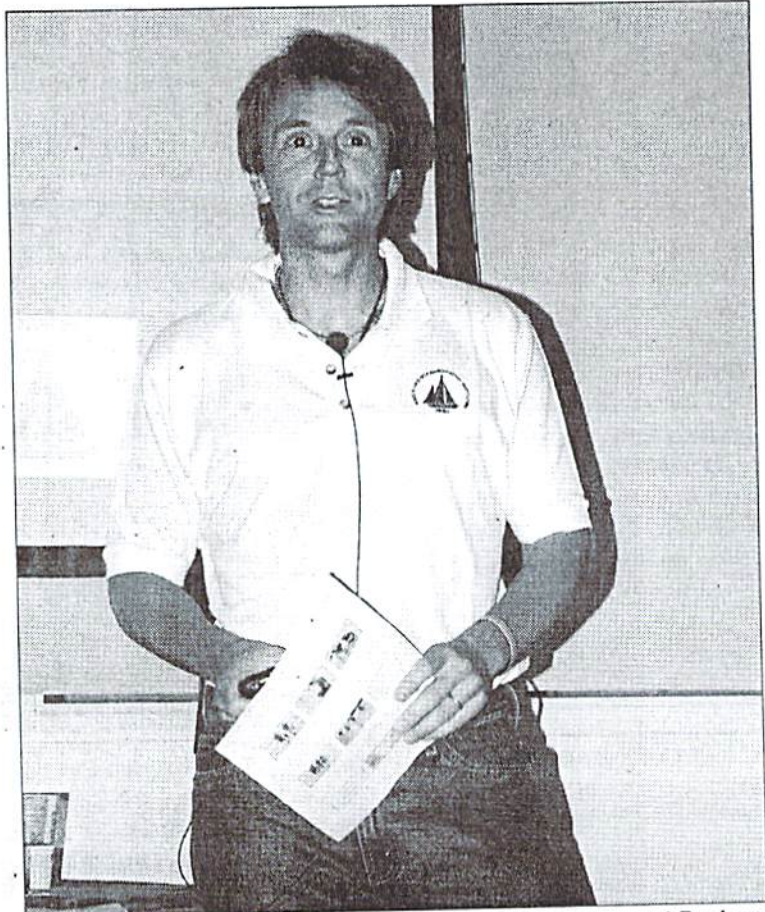
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the island.

Zanzibar is off the eastern coast of Africa and is technically part of the country Tanzania, although they retain some autonomy. Woods Hole scientist and Duxbury resident Hauke Kite-Powell has been traveling to the country for many years.

"It's one of many projects I'm involved in, but it's one of my favorites," he told a packed lecture hall at Duxbury Bay Maritime School on Wednesday night.

The current project is to start a shellfish hatchery in Zanzibar that will help replenish the already-overfished natural stocks of oysters and clams. Kite-Powell said the program has three goals: to increase the production of shellfish, to promote economic opportunities for women in rural villages and to build a knowledge of shellfish farming. He hopes the hatchery will be up and fully functional sometime this year (the local technician is still trying to get the hatchery shellfish to spawn consistently) and that from 2011-12, the team will focus on growing out the stock and teaching business skills.



Hauke Kite-Powell talks about the project during a lecture at Duxbury Bay Maritime School on Wednesday evening.

In the coastal villages of Zanzibar, harvesting shellfish has traditionally been seen as women's work, while the men fished for finfish in their boats. In the recent past, Zanzibar has become known for their seaweed farms — work usually done by women.

"It was the beginning of empowerment for some women in the coastal villages in particular," said Kite-Powell. "We saw shellfish farming as a natural extension of that."

Why shellfish? Kite-Powell pointed out that oysters and clams are relatively easy to cultivate and they provide protein, as well as money.

"Seafood is an important part of human nutrition globally," he said, adding that seafood accounts for about 20 percent of the animal protein humans consume globally. The amount of seafood that is cultivated rather than wild-caught is also on the rise.

"We farm things, that's become true of seafood too," he said.

In the coastal villages of Zanzibar, women have traditionally harvested shellfish

from long tidal flats.

"It's unusual for the tropics to have a large tidal range," he said, noting that the work is physically difficult and the deepest beds are only accessible about once a month.

"We realized the only way to significantly increase the harvest of shellfish was to grow from seed in a hatchery," Kite-Powell said.

In a hatchery, local shellfish farmers could keep a "broodstock" and encourage them to reproduce, growing the "seed" oysters until they're large enough to transplant.

"No one had ever built a shellfish hatchery in East Africa before," Kite-Powell said.

In a small lab in the capital city of Stone Town, Woods Hole staff as well as representatives from Island Creek are working to cultivate the broodstock. Eventually, they will be producing seed oysters and clams that can be transplanted to the villages. The goal, Kite-Powell said, is to get the mortality rate under 50 percent.

"If it works, which I'm sure it will, it can be replicated in other places," he said. "This could be the beginning of something really big."

He said the team is waiting for the local technician to be able to get the broodstock to spawn consistently before they will make a return trip. He said the team will head

back to Zanzibar about twice a year.

"It's very rewarding to do something that has a direct effect on the lives of people in those villages," he said.